



The Bureau of Downtown Development administers an economic development program targeting Wisconsin's historic commercial districts. Bureau staff provides technical support and training to Wisconsin communities that have expressed a grass roots commitment to revitalizing their traditional business districts using a comprehensive strategy based on historic preservation.

What is Wisconsin Main Street?

The program was established in 1987 to encourage and support the revitalization of downtowns in Wisconsin. Each year, the Department of Commerce selects communities to join the program. These communities receive technical support and training needed to restore their Main Streets to centers of community activity and commerce.

How does a community join the Wisconsin Main Street Program?

Each year, the Department selects up to three Wisconsin communities for acceptance into the program. While statutes allow up to five communities to be added annually, the Council on Main Street has sought to limit the number of new communities to ensure that there is adequate staffing to maintain the program's quality and reputation.

Program participants are selected following a rigorous review process, which considers the following:

- The need for the Main Street program in a community and its expected impact on the community.
- The capability of the applicant to successfully implement the program.
- The level of public sector interest and commitment.
- The historic significance of the proposed business area and the level of interest and commitment toward historic preservation.

- The cohesiveness, distinctiveness, character and variety of business activity in the proposed commercial area.
- The financial capability to employ a full-time manager (half-time if the community's population is 3,500 or less), fund a local Main Street program, and support area business projects.

What is the Four-Point Approach?

This emphasizes the elements of design, organization, economic restructuring, and promotion

- **DESIGN** – This element works on enhancing the appearance of the business district. Historic building rehabilitation, street and alley clean-ups, colorful banners, landscaping and lighting all improve the visual aspects of the downtown as a quality place to shop, work, relax, invest, and live.
- **ORGANIZATION** – It is essential to build a framework that includes representation by civic groups, merchants, bankers, citizens, public officials, and chambers of commerce. A strong organization provides the stability to build and maintain a long-term effort.
- **ECONOMIC RESTRUCTURING** – Current market forces must be analyzed to develop long-term solutions. Economic restructuring may involve recruiting new businesses, creatively converting vacant space to new uses, and improving the competitiveness of Main Street's traditional merchants.
- **PROMOTION** – Promotions create excitement downtown. Street festivals, parades, retail events, and image

Wisconsin Main Street is based on the philosophy of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, which advocates restoration of the historic character of downtowns while pursuing traditional development strategies such as marketing, business recruitment and retention, real estate development, market analysis, and public improvements.

development campaigns are some of the ways Main Street encourages consumer traffic in the downtown. Promotion involves marketing an enticing image to shoppers, investors, and visitors.

What services are provided to Main Street communities?

- Downtown Development staff provide on-site assistance to communities in the form of one- or two-day visits, targeted to meet the needs of the individual community.
- Downtown Development staff deliver a two-day orientation and training session to new Main Street managers, in addition to providing quarterly workshops for managers and volunteers in participating communities. State and national experts speak on relevant topics in the field of downtown revitalization at these workshops.
- Wisconsin Main Street's small business specialist provides free, on-site consultation to existing and potential business owners in Main Street districts. These confidential sessions cover areas such as marketing, business planning, advertising, financial analysis and inventory control. The small business specialist also assists communities with business retention and recruitment programs.
- Free, on-site design assistance is offered to property owners and merchants in Main Street districts. The Wisconsin Main Street design coordinator addresses design issues for historic commercial buildings. Services include color renderings, telephone and on-site consultations, building sign design, paint and color scheme suggestions, awning design, tax credit information and information on compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- State staff help each Main Street community develop a workplan by identifying goals and objectives and prioritizing and developing projects for the year. Some communities also receive assistance with strategic and vision planning.

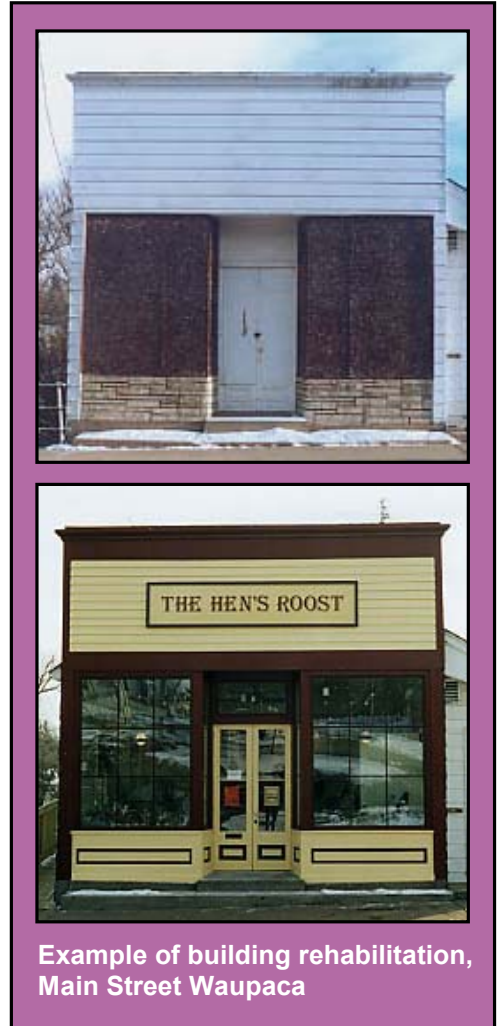
"Extremely helpful whenever I call. Great help in an emergency situation that we called them about."

**– Main Street
Program client**

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- Each new Main Street community also receives intense training on downtown market analysis to assist with business development efforts.
- Staff conduct year-end assessment visits that help both new and mature programs assess progress and address specific issues during two-day sessions.
- Intense on-site training is provided to committees and individuals in participating communities.
- All new Main Street communities receive excellent resource materials on downtown revitalization topics to help them start their own Main Street libraries.



What other services are provided by Downtown Development?

In addition to administering the state's Main Street Program, the Bureau of Downtown Development provides general outreach to Wisconsin communities that are interested in revitalizing their downtown.

- The Bureau arranges field trips to Main Street communities to give other community representatives a firsthand look at revitalization strategies and progress that is taking place.
- Wisconsin Main Street and the Wisconsin Downtown Action Council co-sponsor the annual Governor's Conference on Downtown Revitalization.

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- The bureau conducts workshops to help communities successfully complete the Main Street application, as well as providing information on starting and operating independent downtown revitalization programs.
- Bureau staff offer assistance by telephone or mail.
- Any Wisconsin resident may check out one of more than 300 books, manuals, workbooks, slide programs, or videos on various downtown topics.
- Local Main Street managers are available to speak on a variety of revitalization topics, such as fundraising, business recruitment, retail events, and promotional campaigns.

“Staff does an excellent job of keeping in touch and following through. New manager orientation was handled extremely well.”

**– Main Street
Program client**

In fiscal year 2001-2002, every dollar the state budgeted for the Bureau of Downtown Development resulted in an economic return of \$5.68. This economic return included new real estate taxes generated from building rehabilitation and new building construction as well as new sales and income taxes generated from new businesses and jobs.

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Since 1988, 48 Wisconsin communities have benefited from their participation in the Wisconsin Main Street Program. During fiscal year 2001-2002, the 33 communities that are currently active reported 99 public improvement projects, with a total public investment of \$7,561,003; 286 building rehabilitation projects representing a total investment of \$9,084,046; 19 new buildings representing a total investment of \$23,775,828; 17 new housing units; a net increase of 113 businesses and 441 jobs. There were also 38 business expansions during the period.

The long-term benefits of the program can be seen in Chippewa Falls and Sheboygan Falls – two communities that have received national recognition for their downtown revitalization efforts.

Chippewa Falls, which has been in the program for 13 years, has seen a return of \$17.36 for every dollar it has invested in its Main

Street program. Seven new buildings were constructed and 170 buildings have been rehabilitated. In addition, 43 buildings were sold during that period. The total private investment resulting from Main Street activity was nearly \$21 million. The district grew by 172 businesses and showed a net gain of 847 jobs. New business in the district produced a total, 13-year gain of \$12,240,000 in state sales tax and the new jobs resulted in \$7,268,040 in additional state income tax revenue.

Sheboygan Falls has been in the program for 14 years. During that time, there have been 141 building rehabilitations and one new building construction. Twenty-two buildings have also been sold during that period, which has seen a total private investment of \$8.9 million. The district grew by 63 businesses and showed a net gain of 148 jobs. New business in the district produced a total, 14-year gain of \$5,170,000 in state sales tax and the new jobs resulted in an additional 1,121,328 in state income tax revenue. Sheboygan Falls leveraged \$7.87 for every dollar it invested in the Main Street district.



At left, rehabilitation work is under way at a building at 201-203 East Main Street in Watertown.



Below left, the restored façade invites passers-by to sample the hospitality at Bellows Brew Pub.